

35.0 ATF TRACING CENTER

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35.0 ATF TRACING CENTER

35.1 DESCRIPTION

There is no Nlets online access to the ATF tracing center. Tracing is conducted by the National Tracing Center (NTC), a branch of the Firearms Enforcement Division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF).

35.2 ATF BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) would like to extend its on-going commitment to the law enforcement community by providing participating agencies with a paperless firearm trace submission system that is readily accessible through a connection to the worldwide web (Internet). This system, known as eTrace, provides the necessary utilities for submitting; retrieving, storing and querying all firearms trace related information relative to your agency. The newly developed eTrace application not only provides your agency with the ability to electronically submit firearm trace requests, but also to monitor progress of traces and efficiently retrieve completed trace results in a real-time environment. Additionally, eTrace provides an invaluable new feature that will provide your agency immediate access to a user friendly and searchable online database comprised of all trace requests submitted by your agency. This tool will provide your agency with the ability to perform detailed search functions and customized analysis relative to your jurisdiction.

In recent years, ATF has made a concerted effort to leverage existing information technology to better assist law enforcement agencies in the investigation of illicit firearms trafficking as well as the interdiction of firearm sources to juveniles, youth offenders and other prohibited persons. The eTrace application is the newest tool available to the law enforcement community in a growing investigative arsenal. This correspondence is intended to provide an executive level overview of the eTrace application, to include: availability, functionality, benefits, and the steps required to gain access.

35.3 WHAT IS FIREARM TRACING

Firearm tracing is the systematic process of tracking a recovered crime guns chain of custody from it's source (manufacturer/importer) through the chain of distribution (wholesaler/retailer) to the individual who was the first retail purchaser of the firearm, or to a point where all other possibilities of identifying the original purchaser have been thoroughly exhausted. The ATF National Tracing Center processes approximately 250,000 firearm trace requests for both foreign and domestic law enforcement agencies annually. Comprehensive firearms tracing by jurisdiction or community, involves the tracing of all recovered crime guns within a particular geographic area (e.g., city, county, metropolitan area, or State). Information obtained through the tracing process is utilized to solve and/or enhance individual cases and to maximize investigative lead development through eTrace. For example, the analysis of trace related data might reveal that a particular individual has repeatedly purchased firearms that were later recovered from crimes within your community.

Law Enforcement agencies that make a commitment to comprehensive firearms tracing through ATF will be provided with an information platform for developing the best local investigative strategies for their community in the reduction of firearm related crime and violence. The term “comprehensive firearms tracing” refers both to the quantity and quality of firearm traces submitted. For an agency to succeed in producing meaningful analysis of its firearm tracing information, the relative data must be as complete and accurate as possible. Therefore, true comprehensive firearms tracing occurs when an agency traces all of its recovered crime guns and provides all available information detailing the circumstances of each recovery. The relevant information refers to not just the proper identification of the firearm, but also includes specific details regarding the firearms’ possessor, associates, location of recovery, and associated crime.

35.4 HOW TO CONDUCT A TRACE

ATF will not process any trace request via telephone or other verbal means. All trace requests must be made manually using the trace request form or via the eTrace system.

34.4.1 MANUAL (MAIL / FAX) TRACING

To manually request a firearms trace, complete the National Tracing Center Trace Request Form available on the ATF website at:

<http://www.atf.gov/forms/pdfs/f33121n.pdf>

Send completed forms to:

National Tracing Center
244 Needy Rd.
Martinsburg, WV 25401
800-788-7133 1540
Fax 800-578-7223

34.4.2 ETRACE

The eTrace application was developed and is administered by the ATF National Tracing Center Division. However, access to eTrace is being coordinated through the various ATF Field Divisions located throughout the United States. Receipt of this information packet is the first step towards obtaining system access. To gain access to eTrace, the chief of police (or equivalent) must complete and return the attached Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This MOU will establish an interagency agreement governing the access and utilization of eTrace. In addition, the MOU will designate a primary and alternate point of contact within your agency. The appointed individual(s) will be responsible for providing and maintaining a list of personnel within your department that require access to eTrace.

The MOU will provide a section in which the designated POC must identify all personnel within your organization that you would like to be granted an eTrace account. This list must include the employees' name, title, unit and phone number. The designated POC will also be responsible for contacting the National Tracing Center in the event that an individual's access needs to be suspended or cancelled for any number of reasons, to include: employee transfer, retirement, or release from employment. Please keep in mind that once an account has been issued, failure to access the application for a period of 90 days or more will result in the account being locked out. Therefore, your agency should be somewhat judicious in choosing the individuals whom you would like to grant access to eTrace.

After the attached MOU has been completed and signed by both the local ATF Field Division representative and the chief or your law enforcement agency the original copy should be mailed to the ATF National Tracing Center at the following address:

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives
National Tracing Center Division
Law Enforcement Support Branch
244 Needy Road
Martinsburg, WV 25401
Attn: eTrace Customer Service Group

Upon receipt, a representative from the National Tracing Center will initiate a phone call to the designated point of contact within your organization and provide detailed instructions on the process of requesting and receiving an eTrace user account (user id. and password). Once the user account is created, each user will be individually contacted and provided with their user account information. At that point, the users will be able to access the eTrace application through an Internet connection and immediately begin to take advantage of this real-time firearm trace submission and trace data analysis system